DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 231 544 PS 013 764

AUTHOR van der Ross, R. E.
TITLE The Educational Implications of Disadvantagement at Pre-School and University Level.
PUB DATE Jun 82
NOTE 14p.; Paper also contains "Welcome to Delegates and Friends at the Opening of Proceedings to Mark the 10th Anniversary of the Early Learning Centre at Key Town, Athlone, Cape Town" (June 7, 1982).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; *Compensatory Education; *Disadvantaged; Educational History; *Educational Innovation; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Lower Class; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education
IDENTIFIERS Bernard van Leer Foundation (Netherlands); South Africa

ABSTRACT

If one were to list the more important developments in South African education during the past 4 or 5 decades, the changed attitude toward preschool education would surely rank high on the list. People involved in preschool education have discovered the need to apply recently formulated sociological and psychological theories to preschool education. The specific target of the new approach is the disadvantaged child. The new approach believes that if children are to succeed in middle-class-oriented schools, they must be prepared through exposure to intellectual stimulation and through intervention on a broad front involving all who influence the environment of preschool children. The first preschool for disadvantaged children was started in Athlone, Cape Town, in 1971-72. In 1971 the Early Learning Center in Kew Town, Athlone, a subeconomic township for Colored persons, was launched. The project opened its doors to pupils in 1972. Following the formation of the Athlone Center, other centers have been established. These centers form a network for research units, sharing their knowledge and skills with one another and the wider research community. Because the effects of disadvantagement are also experienced at the university level, universities should be concerned with preschool education and the disadvantaged child. (An appended welcoming address recounts the beginning history of the Early Learning Center and the establishment of the Early Learning Resource Unit.) (RH)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED231544

PS 013764

# THE EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF DISADVANTAGEMENT AT PRE-SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY LEVEL



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

If one were to list the more important developments in South African education during the past four or five decades, the changed attitude to pre-school education would surely rank high on the list.

Although the actual situation in regard to pre-school education still leaves much to be desired, a pre-requisite to any innovation is always the need for teachers, education authorities and the general public to adopt a positive attitude to change, and to positive change, and it is the thesis of this chapter that such attitudinal and orientation changes have indeed taken, and are continuing to take place.

The major development which is discussed here does not concern the need to convince people of either the existence of pre-schooling, or of its need, but rather the changed emphasis given in this area, as well of the consequent changes in method of operation. Indeed, an entirely new philosophy pervades this type of education, and as we review the period during which Professor Behr has been active, also breathing a new spirit into several aspects of South African education, this area deserves mention.

The change of emphasis referred to concerns the fact that people involved in pre-school education have discovered the need to apply newly-discovered sociological and psychological theories to pre-school education in a conscious attempt to make this period of education a more effective part of the child's life and, consequently, to bring about changes in the social structure.

There are certain fundamental objections to using education as an agent of social change, i.e. to the concept of social engineering via education. To be sure, anyone who claims that the educational system *per se* can be employed to bring about basic changes in social-political ideology on a grand scale, is probably deluding himself. But this does not rule out the possibility of education exerting an influence on people in such a way that those people, as they become more influential in society, may be agents of change. Whilst education is not intended to "mould" people, it surely exerts an influence; unless it does this, it is to be doubted if it could really be called education at all.

2/...

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R.E. Van Der Ross

In the matter under discussion, the nature of education comes out very clearly, insofar as we could regard education as a process whereby people are stimulated to think and to react to their environment in a critical and creative manner. Such a broad definition of education does not exclude the function of influencing, for we may substitute "influenced to think" for "stimulated to think" without disturbing the sense. The total effect remains of leaving the conception of education as an on-going, dynamic process.

Now, the specific target of the new approach to pre-school education, is the disadvantaged child. In this context, disadvantagement means the situation wherein the child is from an environment which exposes him to fewer social, cognitive, intellectual, and even emotional stimulation, or to stimuli of such a nature, that he may be regarded as under-exposed in these respects in comparison with other children. The less-stimulated or disadvantaged children, are generally those from the poorer economic sections of our society, whilst those children who are adequately or at least more adequately stimulated, are generally from the middle-class environment.

A basic thesis of this theory is that our schools are by and large middle-class orientated. They accept middle-class norms of speech, general conduct, communication, values, aims and social philosophy. They also assume that children entering school have been adequately prepared for the continuing process of the school on the basis of these middle-class attitudes. It is a further thesis of the theory that this assumption is false in respect of the child from the working class, and more especially the lower working class, who does not come to school thus equipped and prepared. Thirdly the theory holds that it is for this reason that the working-class child faces poorly in the conventional school, fails, drops out or generally achieves a lower rate of performance, is returned to society under-prepared vis-a-vis the middle-class child, and so the cycle of poverty is perpetuated. The final assumption of the theory is, however, that if there is effective intervention in this process of the perpetuation of poverty, the cycle may be broken and upward mobility may be achieved.

In order to illustrate the type of deprivation and of inadequate stimulation referred to, the following may be useful. It should always be remembered, of course, that whilst we are obliged to generalise, there are always exceptions:

3/...

- The disadvantaged child comes from a home, family and immediate environment of play-area, street or yard in which a very restricted verbal code is used.
- Relatively little use is made of language beyond those words and codes barely necessary to express basic needs.

  Words expressing fine nuances of meaning are not common.
- Verbal communication, listening to children, speak, speaking to them, encouraging them to express themselves, and similar forms of social behaviour involving language, are confined to a minimum.
- The development of the concepts required in thinking, such as discrimination between similarities and differences, internalisation, reversing and the association of these proceses with language, is minimal.
- Social processes such as discussions at dinner-table of daily news or events, are restricted. Disadvantaged children do not grow up listening-in to, and later participating in conversation requiring conceptualization, analysis, deduction or the more sophisticated ways in which middle-class society uses the intellectual, cognitive and communicative skills in order to advance its own understanding of the world of which it is a part and to increase its own power over that world.
- Physical and material disadvantagement abounds. The disadvantaged child is far less familiar than the middle-class child is with newspapers, books, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, pictures, puzzles, paints, paper and pencil, and the uses to which the people about put these instruments of the middle-class culture.
- The same may be said of more institutional aspects of our civilisation, such as the law, banks and financial institutions, the church (in respect of control thereof) businesses of all kinds, transport, politics, hospitals and, of course, the school. In respect of these and other institutions, the working-class child is not only shut out, to a large extent, from knowledge of and insight into their workings, but also from the possibility of active participation in their operation and, therefore, from the prospect of sharing in the authority or power which they represent.

One of the consequences of growing up under the above conditions, is that the children (note again that they are mainly of working-class and lower working-class families with low incomes, i.e. "poor"), enter into a school situation designed for middle-class children. The school presupposes that the children entering at the first-year level can and do speak freely, understand and are accustomed to the conversation mode of social behaviour, are familiar with and readily respond in a question and answer situation. Teachers, therefore, use these forms of communication. They assume that when they speak, children listen and understand, or try to understand. They use language with which they believe the children are familiar. They implement a set of social rules such as those of regularity, punctuality, a form of "orderliness," tidiness, respect to elders and acceptance of what they call "good discipline" which they believe comes naturally to the children. And in any or all of these assumptions they could be wrong.

In short, and especially in regard to cognitive reactions and development, the child could be responding at a level far below that expected by the teacher or the school. He could be learning less than is considered to be the normal requirement at that level or age, and he could, therefore be an under-achiever or what the schools, bluntly, erroneously and commonly call a "failure."

There have always been failures at school, even in the first years of schooling. Traditionally the blame has been placed on the child's intrinsic ability - he was "stupid" or "slow." In more sophisticated language, his "low intelligence" was blamed. All of this implied some kind of genetic incapacity. In some cases, the teachers were blamed, their lack of proper training or their own educational standard not being adequate. Or the parents were presumed not to have displayed sufficient interest in their children's education - usually this meant that they did not see to it that the children "learnt" or "studied" at home, or that they did not check their schoolbooks and give assistance in weak areas.

Whilst conceding a measure of truth in all these theories, the new approach lays much more stress on the total environment to which the child is exposed in the first six years of its life - the years before he enters the formal school.

5/...

The new approach believes that if the child is to succeed in the middle-class type of school, she must be prepared for entry into school by being exposed to much more intellectual stimulation than is generally experienced in the environment of the working-class or lower working-class.

The Poverty Cycle refered to above, means that poverty tends to be perpetuated in working class (poor) communities in terms of the following:

(1) Children are born into poor homes
(2) ——→ they grow up in poor communities
(3) ——→ they go to poor schools, often with poor teachers
(4) ——→ they receive poor education
(5) ——→ they achieve poorly in school
(6) ——→ they leave school poorly prepared for the job market
(7) ——→ they get poorly-paid jobs
(8) ——→ they marry into similar poor communities
(9) ——→ they have children in those poor homes communities, and so the whole cycle starts again.

The new type of pre-school programme attempts to break the cycle of poverty by intervening somewhere about stages 1 to 3 or above, thereby enabling the pupils to achieve better at school and so to facilitate their upward mobility in the educational and socio-economic scale.

Because of the obviously closer interaction between school and society, it is realised that the intervention referred to cannot be confined to the school, but must be on a broad front, involving parents, childminders, and community, indeed all who influence the pre-school child's environment in one way or another. Clearly, this also includes local authorities responsible for housing and health and services, and other authorities whose power-situation enables them to extent even the most indirect influence.

And so the new type of pre-school, the pre-school designed specifically for the working-class, low-income, disadvantaged child, comes into being. Historically, the first pre-school of this type,based on the sociology of the sub-culture of poverty, and attempting to break the poverty cycle by determined, goal-directed psychological and educational techniques, was started in Athlone, Cape Town, in 1971-2. In 1971 the Early Learning Centre, in Kew Town, Athlone, a sub-economic townhsip for Coloured persons, was launched. It was funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation which has its headquarters at The Hague, Holland, and which devotes a great deal of its attention to the promotion of community-improvement projects in many parts of the world. Many of its projects are concerned with innovative education at pre-school level.

The project opened its doors to pupils in 1972. Its first Principal was the present writer, assisted by Dr Frank Kessel as Research Director, Miss Ann Short as Research Assistant and Mrs Jill Blaine as head of the team of six nursery school teachers, who had direct charge of some 110 pupils in a créche and nursery school taking children from the age of 6 months - 3 years (in the créche) and 4-6 years (in the nursery school). Later, in 1979 the Early Learning Centre divided into two sections. The teaching centre continued as a practising school for the new methods, as well as for trainees, and is presently under the principalship of Mrs Rosaline Herbert, one of the original (1972) staff of teachers. The research division acquired a separate identity as the Early Learning Research Unit (ELRU) under the directorship of Miss Short.

Following the Athlone centre, others have been established, viz. Entokozweni, in Soweto, Johannesburg, one at Chatsworth, Natal, and St Mary's in Harare, Zimbabwe. These form a network of research units, sharing their knowledge and skills with one another, with similar centres across the world, and with the Foundation's headquarters at The Hague where Dr Willem Welling serves as Director. Each research unit and practising school is in touch with many individual nursery schools, some of which are state-subsidised and others not. Local committees generally control these schools. The Athlone ELRU and ELC are in close touch with some 150 such schools.

Arising from the experience at ELC, special programmes were designed to extend the work of the centre into the community. Parents and other childminders were approached and engaged in discussion, demonstration and instruction so as to increase their awareness of the problems of child care especially at pre-school level, and to assist them in coping more intelligently and effectively with their task. Home visiting, the making of apparatus, a Home -school programme, a teacher-aide training programme, parent education and a toy lending library are among those activities.

The theory of the sub-culture of poverty and the related problems of disadvantagement have serious results for the university students who come from deprived communities. The communities served by the State (ethnic) Universities of Durban-Westville, Western Cape, the North, Zululand and Fort Hare all have considerable numbers of students drawn from the cageory of the working class. These students will necessarily show some or all of the symptoms of learning disability described earlier in this chapter, and so their academic performance will be effected.

7/...

The problem is compounded at university level because the affected communities are poorly served with technical schools or colleges or technicons. Consequently, even more students who should not properly be at University, do attend there. But the Universities cannot lightly turn away students, and so there is generally a high incidence of failure, especially in the first year of study.

Many of those who fail, however, are of good potential, but the disabilities of the earlier years, even of pre-school life, still persist. It is, therefore, entirely relevant that Universities should concern themselves about those years. This could be done directly, e.g. by training pre-school teachers and emphasising the area of the disadvantaged child, or by incorporating the subject into courses of education, sociology, psychology etc. Or it could be done indirectly by the University orienting its general research, publications and outreach to the public and authorities in such a manner as to increase awareness of the problem.

Education is for the future, some of it for the quite distant future. Any investment made in order to ensure better use of facilities, time or human potential is, therefore, to be welcomed. The University should be a leader in this process, and it is fitting that in actively honouring the work of Professor A L Behr, we should include a re-dedication to the cause of education of the disadvantaged and especially of the disadvantaged pre-school child.

---

WELCOME TO DELEGATES AND FRIENDS AT THE OPENING OF PROCEEDINGS TO MARK THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EARLY LEARNING CENTRE AT KEW TOWN, ATHLONE, CAPE TOWN ON MONDAY 7TH JUNE 1982

R E van der Ross

Mr Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to welcome you to this very special occasion. This is the tenth anniversary of the Founding of the Early Learning Centre, and we have been honoured by the presence of

One wonders, can it be that ten years have passed since the ELC started here in Kew Town, Athlone? On the one hand, the time seems to have passed so quickly; on the other, so much has happened that it hardly seems possible that it has all been crowded into ten years!

Anniversaries are always occasions when one looks back with some nostalgia, and possibly some understandable selection of facts, to recall the passage of events. More important is the evaluation of these events to determine how much was good, positive, useful, necessary, constructive or seminal. And, by implication, how much was not.

The ELC is a very special institution in Southern Africa. Speaking as one who had, by the time of its establishment, spent some 30 years actively in teaching and education, I can say quite definitely that it was both unique and vital. It succeeded quite definitely in one of the major aims of its funding mentor, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, in that it was innovative.

Here I wish to employ an old and respected educational technique, namely that of using an individual example to illustrate a more general statement. I refer to my own case. Previous to the establishment of the ELC, I had been engaged in educational activity at all levels from being a primary school assistant teacher, through being a lecturer in educational psychology at a teachers' college, a college head, an education planner and an inspector of schools. And, if I may say it myself, it seemed as if I wasn't doing badly at all, unless we were seeing the operation of the Peter Principle.

PS 0132764

But/...

But, despite all of this progress through the educational system, or possibly because of it, it was not until I made contact with the ELC that I came to understand some of the factors deeply underlying, influencing and bedevilling the education of our children.

Coming away from the placid atmosphere of the establishment school, I learnt that terms like "middle class" and "working class", with all their sub-divisions and connotations, have a real application in the area of education. The new post at the ELC required me to look deeply into the literature relating to the education of children who are disadvantaged or "deprived" in some way, to see how these descriptions apply to the children in our townships, and to inquire into ways whereby these types of disadvantagement may be countered so as to give the children concerned a fairer chance in life.

The reason for recounting this piece of personal history, is that I am firmly convinced that this type of insight had not yet been achieved at any significant level in our South African society at all. Indeed, I believe that there are still many people deeply involved in education who have not yet achieved it, and who continue to practise education blissfully unaware of the concept of disadvantagement, its effects or its treatment.

In the area of the pre-school, however, there has been a revelation. It was due to the interest of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, through its local representation, contacts and friends, that the idea of establishing an ELC in Cape Town came about. The lead was taken by a committee in which Mr Louis Walker of shell played a leading part, assisted by educators such as businessmen such as Dr Frank Robb, prof Vera Grover, Miss Davies and by the indefatigable Mr Nankivell assisted by Mrs Margot Smith. The circle extended to include a large number of other Capetonians whose main concern was to help children to be better people, and the City to improve the quality of life of its citizens.

Somewhere/...

Somewhere during the course of its planning, the Committee approached me and offered me the principalship. I remember an evening where I was cautiously "screened", and where there was a thinly disguised process of trying to decide whether the Committee could possibly associate itself with Dick van der Ross. Presumably I passed the test, and so I was sent on to be further vetted by prof Simon Biesheuvel, who must have approved as well, because I found myself appointed to the post.

It must have been about September, 1971, that I started working in an office in Shell House, Greenmarket Square, now the Inn on the Square Hotel. There I was assisted by Dr Frank Kessel who was Research Director, and there we interviewed for appointment Miss Anne Short (Research Assistant) and Mrs Jill Blaine (Supervisor of the Nursery School). Within a month or so I was sent to Holland, where I first met Dr Willem Welling, Director of the Foundation, and then to a very valuable symposium on early childhood education in Kingston, Jamaica.

The School got under way about March, 1972, when the building was complete. Before the school started, we interviewed and appointed the teachers and non-teaching staff, devised strategies, enrolled children, ordered furniture, and did the many exciting things which accompanied this pioneer stage in a pioneer undertaking. I wish to record my very sincere thanks, to those early co-workers for their sympathy, team spirit and patience, and to name, besides those already mentioned, the ladies Margaret de Kock, Rosaline Herbert, Muskett, Marie Fortuin, Joan Phigeland, Sr Bitner and Mrs Andrews. There were also the social workers Lionel Woldson and Rita Strydom, kitchen staff Mrs Jacobs, Nellie van Neel and Mrs Manuel; the creche staff Maud Watson, Shirley Kinshella, Margie Goliath and Jean Lewis under Nursing Sister "Tickey" Fester, and our groundsman Mr Nero.

The ELC attracted a great deal of attention in those days. It was as if Cape Town was somehow aware that something new and important was happening.

And the expectation aroused was both heightened and fulfilled as the Centre got under way, producing programmes of work and putting them into practice. Much time was spent on staff orientation, in intensive sessions during which we discussed these matter which were new to us in philosophy, concept and approach.

Many/...

Many visitors found their way to our school, and we were much in demand as speakers as the new ideas became more current. And there was no shortage of Doubting Thomases, although we seemed to overcome most of the scepticism as time passed and the effects of our efforts became apparent in the progress of the children.

Essential to the classroom technique and the basic philosophy was the insistence on community involvement, and many programmes were devised to create links between school, parents and community to overcome traditional barriers. I do believe that the community took the ELC to its heart, and evidence of this was that later during the 1976 post-Soweto Riots, when so many schools and public buildings were ravaged by riotious crowds, not a single pane of glass at the ELC was broken!

Out of the concern expressed by our staff, and out of community need and acceptance, grew other activities, such as the BABS or Build a Better Society organisation, which started under our roof and has itself become a thriving community organisation operating in many parts of the Republic.

To return to the ELC proper. The success of our efforts has been shown in many ways. Before 1972, for instance, few people if any in this country realised the relation between poverty and education. Indeed, few people traced the many social ills of our country to poverty. The very word "poverty" was a bad word, not to be mentioned in polite society.

Furthermore, whilst there was some awareness of the need for pre-school education, it was all of the traditional type. It was the ELC at Athlone that taught South Africa of the need for a special emphasis to be placed on the early childhood education of the disadvantaged child.

The extent of the outreach of the ELC in Kew Town, Athlone is indicated by the fact that similar research units, although on a smaller scale, now operate in Soweto, Johannesburg (Entokosweni), in Chatsworth, Natal, at Viljoenskroon in the Orange Free State, and in Harare, Zimbabwe. Locally, the dissemination of knowledge and skills has proceeded vigorously,



and/...

and we have contact with no fewer than 160 nursery schools in Cape Town and greater Cape Town, and then beyond to Namaqualand, Transkei and Ciskei. Contact is established through two-directonial visits, courses at the ELC, short orientation courses, and correspondence courses for teacher-aides.

The establishment of the Early Learning Resource Unit as an independent section, under the direction of Miss Anne Short, was at once a tribute to our work, and to the generosity of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

It is also important to be able to report that the influence of the ELC has been relayed to national level, through evidence presented to the Commission of Inquiry into the Coloured People (the Theron Commission) which reported in 1976, on which I served. And the E.L. Resource Unit played an important role in the preparation of evidence before the Human Sciences Research Council's investigation into education (the de Lane investigation) which reported in 1981. In its Report the HSRC made some very positive proposals in respect of early childhood education and took careful note of the need for some form of "compensatory" education to meet the situation of the disadvantaged child. Where I serve on the continuation committee advising the Cabinet on the implementation of these recommendations, you may be assured that I shall do my best to act in the spirit of our philosophy.

If it is true of children that the first six years of life are the most important, it is probably also true that for Early Learning Centres the first 10 years are vital. In this period we have seen a tremendous process of growth and of maturing, so that - starting from scratch - our institution in Kew Town Athlone probably ranks among the best of its kind in the world. There has been a development of individuals, so that many who came here as novices, now rank as experts. But, most important, the growth is to be perceived among the children who have passed through this school. Some of these must now be 15 or 16 years old, and to the best of my knowledge they have done well. Surely, this is what the entire effort is about.

6/...

And so, to our mentors and our friends, Welcome and Thank You. May you continue to prosper in all your efforts, strengthened by the knowledge that the Athlone ELC has proved itself, and that the lives of many, many children are richer, fuller and happier because of you.

---